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TENANCY IN THE WESTERN STATES¹

SUMMARY

Characteristics of the Western States, 364. — Low percentage of tenancy and low price of land, 365. — Decline in tenancy since 1900, 367. Percentage of tenancy greatest for farms of medium price, used for grain farming, 369. — Very low percentage of tenancy on fruit farms, 370. — Changes in tenancy in the West since 1880, 372. — In the United States at large a slow but certain increase of tenancy, 373. — Yet there is no tenant class; tenancy is a step toward ownership, 374. The relation between tenants and owners needs to be improved, 375.

The Western division of states, or in terms of the census of 1910, the Mountain and Pacific divisions combined, comprise twelve states, occupying the Rocky Mountain region and extending westward to the Pacific Ocean. In area these states are large, being equal to two-fifths of the land surface of the United States. From the standpoint of agriculture, however, they do not fill so important a place. Within this vast extent of territory are found but one-seventeenth of the whole number of farms of the United States, one-eighth of the acres of farm land, and one-ninth of the total value of farm land and buildings. In comparison with the North Central States there are but one-fifth as many farms, three-tenths as many acres of farm land, and less than one-fifth as great a value of farm land and buildings.

As to their products, the western states make a good showing, whether in proportion to the number of

¹ The preceding articles are: "Tenancy in the North Central States," in this Journal for August, 1911: "Tenancy in the North Atlantic States," *ibid.*, November, 1911.

farms or to the acres of farm land. Of wheat these states, with 9.1 per cent of the total acreage, report 13 per cent of the total product. Of barley they report 23 per cent of the acreage and 27 per cent of the product. In the acreage of oats they report 5.5 per cent of the total, and in the proportion of bushels produced, 6.8 per cent. A showing no less good is made in respect to hay and forage, the division reporting one-eighth of the acreage, and one-sixth of the yield of this crop. A still better showing is made in fruit production, altho comparisons with other divisions are not altogether easy to make. Of the total number of cattle of the country these states contribute about 15 per cent, and of the sheep, 59 per cent.

It is thus apparent that the western states are characterized by a low average price of land, accompanying which one finds, so far as the main extent of acreage is concerned, the live stock and the grain-growing industries. There are, however, a great number of instances of agriculture as highly specialized as is to be found anywhere in the United States. This, for the most part, is devoted to fruit and vegetable farming. Where the general and the specialized farming is within the same county it is not a simple matter to trace the characteristics of each as regards tenure. However, in a considerable number of instances the types of farming are fairly separated, making the case an easier one.

Another prominent characteristic of the western country is its newness. Of the acreage of farm land added to the total within the United States during the past decade, nearly half was within this division of states. More homesteads have been taken during the past decade than for any other since the passage

of the Homestead Act. During the same time a few thousand Carey Act entries have been made, and in addition, large numbers of farms have been granted under the various other acts in vogue. Within the past seven years entries of public land in the western states have equalled in extent the entire state of New Mexico. Nearly all of the farms recently acquired from the government are counted as owned farms and so tend to reduce the proportion of rented farms within the states in which they are located.

Of the 373,000 farms in the Western division in 1910, 52,000, or 14.1 per cent were in the hands of tenants. This is a smaller percentage than for any of the geographic divisions of states except New England, and less than two-fifths that for the United States as a whole. Moreover, the price of land is lower in the western states than in any other division of northern states outside of New England. Taking the northern and western states by divisions, as now recognized by the Census Bureau, the relation of tenancy to value of land may be viewed in the large. It would hardly be instructive to include in this comparison the southern states, since the tenant question is there so essentially different from that of the North.

VALUE OF LAND AND PER CENT OF TENANCY

	Value per acre	Per cent of tenancy	Rank in value	Rank in tenancy
East North Central . . .	\$61.32	27.0	1	2
Pacific	43.76	17.2	2	4
West North Central . . .	43.20	30.9	3	1
Middle Atlantic	33.85	22.3	4	3
Mountain	19.72	10.7	5	5
New England	19.27	8.0	6	6

The relationship between values and rate of tenancy may seem at first glance to be a very uncertain one, and therefore worthy of little attention. But the absence of correlation in these particulars is due mainly to the high rate of tenancy in the West North Central division, and to the low rate in the Pacific division; aside from these two divisions the rankings on the two bases are similar indeed. It will be remembered that in the West North Central division the conditions are especially favorable for the development of the type of farming to which the American system of leasing is adapted, and this fact accounts for the relatively high percentage of tenancy in this division. The table given above shows the Pacific division to rank second in value per acre, altho this and the West North Central division (which ranks third in that respect) are less than a dollar an acre apart. It cannot be doubted that if we consider only the characteristic part of the West North Central division — that is exclusive of the great body of very cheap land in the extreme western and northern portions — then the North Central and Pacific divisions change place as to rank in value per acre; and this single shift brings the rank in value and the rank in tenancy very close together for all divisions. But value per acre is only one factor affecting the proportion of tenancy. As will be pointed out presently, other factors figure with unusual prominence in the western states, holding the percentage of tenant farms below what it would be were only the more general type of farms found. It remains true, however, so far as regards farming of the more usual sort, that the proportion of tenant farms rises with the rise in land values.

The percentage of tenancy in the western states in

1910 was less than that in 1900, when 16.6 per cent of the farms were in the hands of tenants. The decrease is apparently due to two main causes. In the first place the great number of new farms taken from the public domain has increased the number of owned farms and contributed but little to the number of tenant farms. On the other hand, the development of special lines of agriculture, particularly the growing of fruit, has resulted in an increase in the number of small farms in the hands of owners. Aside from these two main causes there are important changes in respect to some of the leading kinds of farming, such as wheat growing; accompanying these movements there has been a considerable change in the percentage of tenant farms. In the main the tenant farms are about the same in size as are the owned farms, altho among the owned farms is found a great majority of those upon which fruit is the chief crop. This would seem to point towards a smaller size; but the tendency is largely offset by the fact that amongst the owned farms are found also the greater proportion of live stock farms, which are on an average very large. It is then the farms intermediate between these largest and smallest ones, namely, the farms on which the most of the general farming is done, such as the growing of the cereals, which show the greater number of tenants.

The land highest in price is not that which for the most part constitutes the tenant farms; the situation being thus unlike that in the North Central states. On the contrary, inasmuch as the land highest in price is that used for fruit growing and this industry is mainly in the hands of owners, a large percentage of ownership instead of tenancy appears on this highest priced land.

In California, within the counties in which land is worth \$60 or more per acre, the percentage of tenancy is 20.1, while in the counties in which it is worth from \$30 to \$60 per acre, the percentage of tenancy is 22.5, and in those under \$30 per acre, 19.8 per cent. The situation, with reference to the high-priced land, is unlike that in any one of the states of the Middle West. Likewise, in the state of Washington, in the counties in which the average value of land is \$60 or more per acre, the percentage of tenancy is 12.9, in counties with values from \$30 to \$60 per acre, the percentage of tenancy is 15.9, while in counties with farm land valued at less than \$30 per acre it is 11.7 per cent. In Colorado the counties with land at \$35 and over per acre show 25.7 per cent of tenancy; those with land at \$20 to \$35 per acre, 30.8 per cent.

Using as the criterion the total value of the farm instead of value per acre, it appears that the tenants are in charge of the high-priced farms much more than is the case with those low in price. In Oregon the group of counties showing the lowest priced farms has 12.5 per cent of all farms in the hands of tenants; the group of medium price, 16.2 per cent; and the group of highest price, 17.6 per cent. In Washington the percentages on the same basis are 6.2 per cent for the cheapest farms, 12.7 for the medium, and 19.9 for those highest in price. In Colorado the low-priced group shows 9.8 per cent of tenant farms, the medium, 18.7 per cent, the highest priced group, 28.7 per cent. This relationship between price of farms and tenancy is due in the main to one general fact. Here as elsewhere the tenants are doing the extensive rather than the intensive farming; they are the grain farmers. Conditions are such that the average value of the

grain farm is above that of the stock farm, since the latter, altho large, is usually very low in price per acre. Again, the grain farm as a unit is of higher value than the fruit farm, since the latter, tho high in value per acre, is of small size.

The proportion of farms in the hands of tenants has increased simultaneously with the growth of the small-grain industry, and has decreased where small-grain farming has declined. For the Western division as a whole the tenants have been raising about 50 per cent more than their proportional share of the oats and wheat, and more than double their share of the barley. Wheat growing was carried on in California on a considerable scale for many years until within the past decade, and was located mainly in the great central valleys of the state. With hardly an exception the counties in which there were great acreages of wheat show a higher percentage of tenancy than the average for the state. Since 1900 the wheat-growing industry has declined greatly throughout these valleys, and during the same time the percentage of tenancy has fallen from a proportion above that for the whole state to one quite below it. The same situation is found in Oregon, where with the decline of the wheat industry in the western part of the state the proportion of tenant farms has decreased to a marked degree. On the other hand, the acreage of wheat has increased rapidly in the northeastern part of the state and at the same time the proportion of tenant farms has gained rapidly. So in the state of Washington: while the percentage of tenant farms decreased during the past decade for the state as a whole, there was a sharp increase in the southwestern part of the state, where also the acreage of wheat increased very greatly, — in fact, more than doubled.

Within the 12 counties leading in wheat, which produce 95 per cent of the wheat grown in the state, 24.2 per cent of the acreage of this grain is reported by tenants.

In contrast to the high percentage of grain-producing farms in the hands of tenants is the very low percentage of fruit farms so operated. The situation found in the eastern states is repeated in the West with emphasis, the more pronounced condition being due to the more highly specialized character of the western fruit farming. The more valuable the fruit farm, either per acre or as a whole, the less likely is it parted with under lease. The oranges, lemons, grapes, and apples are produced mainly by men who own the land on which they are grown. Of the great orange crop of California less than 2 per cent is grown by tenants, and of the lemon crop but little over 4 per cent. Vineyards are not so high in price per acre as are orange and lemon groves, neither does it take so long to bring them to bearing age; hence a somewhat larger percentage is in the hands of tenants. Yet in the 14 leading grape-growing counties of California the proportion of grapes produced by tenants is but 9.2 per cent, while in the same counties the proportion of tenant farms is 21 per cent or over twice as great. Apples are not grown so exclusively by special farmers; they are reported in considerable quantities from farms on which grain is the leading source of income. Hence the grain farms in the hands of tenants frequently produce important amounts of apples. In the seven leading apple-growing counties of Washington one-sixth of the farms are operated by tenants, but they report only 13 per cent of the apples grown. This, however, does not give an accurate picture of the situation, since several of these

counties are among the greatest in the production of wheat, a fact which accounts for the relatively high percentage of tenancy. Within these counties apple growing is a subordinate industry. It is in such counties as Chelan (Washington) or Hood River (Oregon) that the characteristics of the apple farm can be found well isolated. In both of these counties the proportion of tenancy is low; in Chelan county, 6.6 per cent, in Hood River, 5.5 per cent. In Chelan county the tenants report only 4.5 per cent of the apple trees of the country; and in Hood River only 5.6 per cent. For each of these counties the tenants report a higher percentage of the total quantity of apples than of the total number of trees, showing that in a few instances bearing orchards are rented.

Unlike fruit growing, the raising of vegetables is very frequently done by tenants. In 1900 the tenants of the western states operated more than double their proportional number of vegetable farms, and altho the same classification is not made for the census of 1910, the situation is apparently unchanged. The most important vegetable-growing districts of the West are in the vicinity of Los Angeles and Seattle. In Los Angeles county 52 per cent of the vegetable acreage is reported by tenants, and about the same in King county, Washington, in which Seattle is located. These vegetable farms are of small size, consisting usually of a few acres of land rented for cash to Japanese or Chinese gardeners.

As in other parts of the United States, the tenant of the Western division owns comparatively little live stock. In 1900 he had not much over half his proportional share; in 1910 the situation was not greatly changed. In a few states, however, the tenants have their full quota of dairy cows, while they un-

doubtedly have in all cases their full share of draft animals, altho it is difficult in the statistics available to distinguish them from range animals.

PER CENT OF TENANCY 1880-1910

	1910	1900	1890	1880
Western States	14.1	16.6	12.1	14.
Montana	8.9	9.2	4.8	5.3
Idaho	10.3	8.7	4.6	4.7
Wyoming	8.2	7.6	4.2	2.8
Colorado	18.2	22.6	11.2	13.
New Mexico	5.5	9.4	4.5	8.1
Arizona	9.3	8.4	7.9	13.2
Utah	7.9	8.8	5.2	4.6
Nevada	12.4	11.4	7.5	9.7
Washington	13.7	14.4	8.5	7.2
Oregon	15.1	17.8	12.5	14.1
California	20.6	23.1	17.8	19.8

Since 1880 tenancy in the western states has fluctuated considerably, as the table shows. Beginning in that year with 14 per cent it fell to 12.1 per cent in 1890, rose to 16.6 per cent in 1900, and decreased again in 1910 to a figure just barely above that of thirty years before. Notwithstanding the decrease in tenancy in the North Atlantic states during the past decade, there has been in general an appreciable advance in the proportion of tenant farms for the thirty-year period between 1880 and 1910. But the western states show no such tendency. Of the eleven states in the Western group but a single one, Wyoming, shows for the whole period an uninterrupted increase in the proportion of tenancy, and as it happens, it has had throughout nearly the lowest proportion of any of these states. With hardly an

exception, the states in which the most extensive systems of farming have predominated, and these are the older states in point of agricultural development, are the ones in which the percentage of tenant farms is highest.

For the United States other than the South, 25.6 per cent of the farms in 1910 were operated by tenants, as compared to 25.5 per cent so operated in 1900. The difference seems to be virtually *nil*. To say, however, that the advance in the proportion of tenancy has come to a standstill would be unwarranted. As shown in the preceding articles in this series the tendency is still apparently toward more tenancy in the greater portion of the upper Mississippi valley, by far the most important agricultural area of the North. This tendency toward slow but certain increase is offset for the present, partly by the decreases in the East where cheaper land and specialized farming promote ownership, and partly by the peculiar conditions of the Western division of states, where both specialized agriculture and the public domain are factors in keeping the proportion of ownership high and that of tenancy low. No type of farm is immune from tenancy infection, tho a few types are nearly so, while on the other hand, certain types are especially susceptible. The change, so far as the great body of farms in the North is concerned, is imminent, notwithstanding the apparent respite in the advance. Yet it remains true that the increase in the proportion of rented farms for the United States as a whole, from 35.3 per cent in 1900 to 37 per cent in 1910, is due chiefly to the relative increase of farms of this class in the South, where the problem is an essentially different one.

Altho there are many tenants in the United States

there is, outside of the colored tenants of the South, no tenant class. The tenants are young men who turn to this way of getting a start in the business of farming. In almost all cases the beginning is made in the hope of becoming a farm owner within a comparatively few years. That hope, tho frequently long deferred, is eventually realized in the greater number of cases. For example, the census of 1900 shows that between the ages of 25 to 34 more farmers were tenants than farm owners. But the change in form of ownership begins at once after the age of 34, and for the higher age groups owners are more numerous than tenants. At the age of 65 years or over owners are more than five and a half times as numerous. There has been much dispute as to whether or not tenancy is a step toward ownership, but the case does not seem open to argument. Tenancy is a means of getting a foothold and makes possible the ultimate ownership of land. The only question — an open one — is whether it is the best means of accomplishing the result.

Tho we have many tenants, we do not have, outside of a few instances, a tenant system. The relation of tenant to landlord is an uncertain one, and very frequently one unsatisfactory to both parties. Such it must remain until the landlord is willing to content himself with a reasonable rate of income on the investment rather than to hope for something more than ordinary income, something in the nature of speculative gain to be realized only by selling the land. On the other hand, the tenant must be given some assurance that he may stay, if he wishes, more than a year or two on the same farm. Men fail to become land owners, or postpone for years the time when they become owners, because farming as they

pursue it does not pay well enough to enable them to buy land. The reason it fails to pay better is doubtless because the tenant as a rule is not a good farmer; but the fault is not altogether his. The owner of the land leases it under such terms that the tenant is not encouraged in the use of scientific methods. The tenant is far from being a conservationist. He is interested in immediate results, and immediate results are obtained by exploitation. Moreover, the tenant does not even produce the best crops; he lags behind the farmer who tills his own soil. From two standpoints, then, society has cause for complaint; for society has a right to expect good results in the yield of crops and such care of the soil that it will continue at its maximum productivity. Furthermore, society is concerned with the relation of every individual to the community; but the tenant is little disposed to assume community responsibilities.

To complain of the growth of tenancy is useless. The serious question is that of a remedy. A remedy, if there be one, must be in the nature of a plan by which a young farmer can buy land. With the land high in price, the purchase must be mainly on credit. True, the products of the farms are also high in price, but our bunglesome system of distribution returns to the farmer but half or two-thirds of the price the consumer shortly pays. Could the farmer overcome this expensive way of getting his wares to the market, he could more easily own the land on which they grow. Another great problem is that of agricultural credit. It has been well solved in several European countries; but in America the farmer pays a high rate of interest on what he borrows, and is frequently short of ready capital for carrying on advantageously the operations of the year. A good system of marketing

and a good system of credit would retard the movement toward tenancy. But even so, an equitable system of leasing land is needed, one which in itself will make tenancy more tolerable and possibly less frequent. The arrangement under which one man owns the land and another tills it is not necessarily bad ; it may conceivably be of advantage. Yet it must be recognized that land ownership on the part of the farmer is one of the best assets he can have both as a producer and as a citizen.

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